



June 21, 2009

Some local officials have taken issue with my decision to forgo requesting earmarks. While I appreciate and respect the views of all Hoosiers, including those officials and this newspaper, I believe some clarification is in order not only about my position on earmarks, but regarding the nature of this system of earmarking in general.

From the outset, it is important to recognize that the earmarking system as we know it in Washington, D.C., is an extremely recent phenomenon, hardly a historic or even intended vehicle of spending taxpayer money. Even a cursory review of history reveals that the size and breadth of earmarking has exploded only in the last decade and has ushered in an era of reckless spending and sobering levels of government corruption. The oft-cited transportation bill brings this fact into high relief. The first national highway bill in the 1950s had only two earmarked projects. In the last highway bill passed by Congress, there were well over 6,000 earmarks, including the very emblem of public waste, the infamous "Bridge to Nowhere."

Hoosiers deserve better from their representative than someone who goes along to get along. I am not willing to participate in a deeply flawed system that facilitates and encourages corruption, all the while betraying the public's trust and wasting the public's money. While I do not believe that all earmarking is inherently wrong, the current process of earmarking federal funds for particular districts and projects is too opaque, and I believe that there is too little accountability in the current process for me to participate and still be able to bring about the kind of reform this process so sorely needs. I understand the fears that my refusal to request earmarks will result in money for important projects going elsewhere. I did not take these concerns lightly when I made my decision.

I simply believe that Hoosiers deserve better and I will continue to advocate for a government as good as them.

To be fair, the earmarking process spiraled out of control under Republican control of Congress in the mid-1990s as thousands of unexamined projects were added at the last minute without the public scrutiny or debate that accountability demands. Sadly, this reckless and profligate practice has continued and expanded in subsequent legislative sessions, and we have seen the fruit of irresponsibility and fraud manifest in the growing number of public officials who are serving time in prison or are under federal investigation.

I have been an advocate throughout my career in Congress for reform and despite rules that have been added in recent months, I still believe that this system continues to allow waste, corruption and lacks the kind of transparency that would restore public confidence in the federal budget process. After years of agitating for reform from within the system, I made the judgment that such reforms could be best effected from outside the process, with clean hands.

Some have said that I have chosen principle over money for local projects. The truth is that I think we can choose both integrity and efforts to fund important projects. That is the course I am pursuing. While my position may be disappointing to some, it has not adversely affected my capacity to be an effective resource and advocate for my constituents.

In the case of the transportation bill, I have requested that the funds set aside for earmarks would instead be allocated to the Indiana Department of Transportation, increasing the amount of federal transportation funding available for projects in Indiana, while still maintaining my commitment to not divert taxpayer dollars to special projects outside of the normal competitive and merit-based review process.

Not only that, but I continue to work with local officials to secure other sources of government funding for Eastern Indiana. Since announcing my decision to not participate in business as-usual, local businesses and local government obtained more than \$13 million for Delaware County alone in 2008. In 2009, thus far, more than \$7 million has been secured for Delaware County in grant funding. In 2008 and so far in 2009, the Sixth Congressional District has been the beneficiary of more than \$90 million in grant funding, all without requesting earmarks. I will continue to work with local leaders as an advocate for worthwhile local projects.

I believe the goal of every public official should be to serve his or her constituents with the highest degree of integrity. The earmarking process in Washington, D.C., is deeply flawed and has resulted in wasteful government and in some cases outright corruption, and I refuse to be party to it any longer until there is a fundamental shift in the way tax dollars are spent. In taking

a stand for reform and by working to bring federal grants to our district, I believe I am serving not only the interests of the people of East Central Indiana, but their values as well.

This op-ed is available [HERE](#) .

A similar op-ed ran in the [*Fort Wayne News-Sentinel*](#) .